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Mayor Coleman Launches \$25 million “HOME AGAIN” Initiative Against Blighted Housing in Preview to State of the City Address

(Columbus) More dangerous, abandoned homes are being demolished in 2006, as the City works to remove the blighted and often crime-ridden structures that can't be saved in Columbus neighborhoods. Leading into tonight's State of the City Address, Mayor Michael B. Coleman joined east side residents of the Driving Park neighborhood to tear down an unsafe, vacant house at 901 Miller Avenue as he announced a new \$25 million neighborhood revitalization initiative called HOME AGAIN.

“The City and residents in many neighborhoods are fed up with vacant and abandoned houses, and the owners who refuse to take care of them,” said Mayor Coleman. “That’s why we are working together to launch HOME AGAIN, and we’re putting our money up front to make a difference. Today, we begin with the demolition of one bad house, but we’re going to continue by investing \$25 million in building new homes on vacant lots, rehabilitating older homes, and investing in a better, safer future for our neighborhoods.”

Mayor Coleman, in his seventh State of the City speech, proposed the HOME AGAIN neighborhood revitalization effort in partnership with City Attorney Rick Pfeiffer, City Council and community groups. The effort will dedicate \$25 million in capital funding over six years to bring new life to some 1,000 blighted properties. The funding will be used to reach five primary goals: prevention, aggressive code enforcement, acquisition of properties, rehabilitation, and when necessary, demolition.

Columbus City Attorney Rick Pfeiffer worked closely with the Mayor to design the initiative and is committing full-time attorneys to work with City Code Enforcement Officers and Columbus Police to enforce the law against problem properties.

“It is encouraging to see that we have concerns for all of our neighborhoods,” said the City Attorney. “From the neighborhoods to the courts, we will be there with citizen to help address this important issue.”

Partners in this effort will include Columbus/Franklin County Affordable Housing Trust Corporation, the Ohio Housing Finance Agency/Authority, and The Ohio Capital Corporation for Housing.

Mark Milligan, President of the Affordable Housing Trust, said that the Mayor's leadership will have broad impact. "This is the largest commitment the City has ever made to creating affordable housing and revitalizing neighborhoods," said Milligan. "When you transform boarded-up houses to homes that working families can afford to own, the benefits are compelling. Houses become homes again; streets get safer; and neighborhoods have restored pride. That's an excellent value proposition for the funds the Mayor is committing."

Working with the Mayor, a crew from the Ransom Company began demolishing 901 Miller Avenue this morning, at a cost of \$5,000. The home, which was damaged in a 2004 fire, has stood vacant for nearly three years after the property owner abandoned it and it went into foreclosure. Police also responded to an aggravated assault at this address in 2004.

The Columbus Franklin County Affordable Housing Corporation can be contacted at 614-228-6488.